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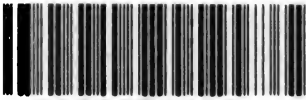
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Dominus vobiscum: or, The sailor boy



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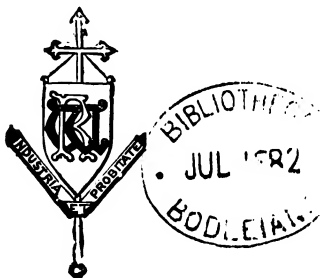
OR,

THE SAILOR BOY.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY

F. B. DREW BICKERSTAFFE DREW.



R. WASHBOURNE,
18 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

1880.

A. M. D. G.

I LAY this at the feet of those Holy Angels who do always behold the face of Our Father that is in heaven, and who on earth fight ever on the side of little children in the Holy War : that by their ceaseless intercession, some grain of good may be given by God to each reader of these pages, and may spring up bearing glorious fruit.

DOMINUS VOBISCUM;

OR,

THE SAILOR BOY.

CHAPTER I.

“It was the winter wild.”

All the whole land lay dead, and robed for her burial in a universal shroud of snow. The pine-trees stood out black against the leaden sky, and there was no sound of beast or bird. The sad throstles sat disconsolate and dumb upon the naked boughs, the lark no more outpoured her song at the heavenly gate, nor longer did the woodlands echo back the dove's most sweet complaint: all mourned together over the dying year, for his days were drawing to a close.

Only seven more mornings would he, the Old Year, see the sun break feebly forth, late appearing, and hard struggling for the

mastery with the dreary fogs ; only a few more times might the silver moon lay her mild glory over the sleeping earth. It was the eve of Christ's nativity.

Old Christmas Eve had come once more—come this time decked out in all her solemn trim, and all the rivers of the land stood still in reverent silence to greet her coming, and the Lord who came of old with her.

It was late evening, and long ago the puny sun had fainted in the grey heavens, falling down drearily into the impatient night : the waning moon had already risen up to peer ghostly down on the shuddering earth ; the deathly silence of winter night, only more utterly still than the stillness of winter day, was fallen upon us.

Come with me ; away from your great cities, away from your warm ease, out into the chill night. Let us leave far behind all the homes of men, and take our way across the desolate wolds. Here is not any sound at all, not even your weary moaning of the starven sea. God has laid His royal hand upon all things, saying : "Hush, for the

hour is very sacred : listen to the voices that in silence are heard the best."

And then, across the great gulf of twenty centuries, comes rolling up, solemn and sweet, most wildly glad, the once-sung, forever-echoed, song of the Holy Angels ; the angelic symphonies ring in our eager ears, and stir well our thoughtful hearts, to the memory of that first Christmas Eve, long, long ago, when the old things were done away, and all things began at once to become new.

Very sweetly ring those glad hosannas over the silent land, white-robed for the great festival, over the great, awful forests, where pines alone wait darkly vested for the Christ that is to be, and all other trees have cast away their summer glory in eager, longing emulation of that Divine Humility that then put off the heavenly majesty to take our meaner dress.

Ay, very sweetly to those who will but listen. Alas ! shame on us, O my brothers, how few of all us in this great England listen to the old song of the angel cohorts ! We have other thoughts, sordid and mean,

and most un-Christlike, and these shut out those glorious harmonies: the best of us who remember a little what Christmas means, have but a selfish joy.

Come out into the night: here, on the terrible wolds, where no path or road shows for the great white pall, where only chilly death threatens for him who tarries long, struggles a fair boy.

Not a score of times has Christmas come to him; he is but a slim youth, a boy in voice, and heart, and face. And he is come home from long voyaging on the trackless sea, for many months has he looked up at night-time towards other constellations than ours, beheld more wildly prodigal splendours of land and sea; great wonders in the deep has he seen, and grown to marvel at no more. There, where the palm lifts high her hands to heaven, and "the almond-trees do flourish, and the locust is made fat;" where emerald isles are set in sapphire seas, and golden sand-belts gird them round; where all fragrance steals on the listless gale, and all beauty smiles beneath the royal sun, there has he wandered far. Strange beasts

have prowled around him as he slept at night, strange birds by day have fluttered scarlet wings, and glories of blue and gold and green above his head, singing strange melodies; beneath his feet, as he sailed the idle seas, have strange and great fishes flashed through coral forests more divers-hued than they. And now he is come back.

Dull, leaden skies, and a world all one chill white, are his instead, and he loves the unequal change.

It is the old country of his race, and to no other land will he go out, and say: "Here I will dwell." For the old is better. Old friends, and wine, and fatherland, all are the best.

And so at the Christmas time he comes again to his own people, who eagerly await, some with many tears, his home-return.

Yesterday he left the sullen sea; and since, with face turned steadfastly in, away from her thunderous roar, he has pressed bravely homeward. But snows have held him back and made the road hard to find, so that at last the old coach has given up, and for the

last dozen miles he will have to struggle on afoot.

For three hours has he been trudging, as he hopes, across the wolds; as he fears, around and around them. It is hard to be thus baulked, so near the journey's end, and the youth becomes impatient, and so becoming, pays less heed to the way, so that he wanders far from it, away from the broad cart-road, up slopes and down into little dips and hollows, until he is dazed and weary.

"I will sit down and rest a bit," he thinks; but a voice within cries:

"Do not so, for you will sleep—and here, to sleep is death!"

It is very dark, and the moon is often blurred by the banks of snow-clouds; often all heaven and earth are blent into one great black obscurity. A little longer he struggles on, and once more the longing to lie down and sleep steals over him. Again the voice of his angel bids him have courage and be a man, and then, rising once more out of a sheltered hollow, and coming again on to the open wold, he sees, as it seems, far off a little ruddy light.

With head again erect, and firmer tread, the boy makes for the friendly gleam that shines steady and warm and sure ; he draws more near, and against the leaden sky a yet darker bulk stands out.

He is at the door and knocks, but no one answers : he knocks again, his heart wildly beating in feverish hope and fear. Suppose the house is empty and made fast : is he to stand out in the cold, right at the very threshold of a comfortable dwelling-place ? But no ; why then the light ? Only it is late, and those within have gone perhaps to rest, and they are hard to rouse.

So he knocks louder, but no one answers. He lays his hand upon the lock, it turns, and, creaking, the door opens as he presses against it.

It is a very small space in which he finds himself, but, groping around, he feels another door which also yields and opens to him. Then he sees again the ruddy light, and looks around.

At first the light seems very dim, and he can hardly see more than the crimson flame itself ; but little by little his eyes grow used

to the soft glimmer, and out of the darkness one thing stands plainly forth.

It is the crucified Jesus.

CHAPTER II.

AND over the mind of the boy passes a full flood of long-forgotten memories. He sees again a far-off southern land where cactus-flowers bloom, and vast rivers sweep down from unknown hills, over-arched by gloomy groves of enormous tropic ferns and towering palms. He feels again upon his cheek the odorous breath of sandalwood, and hears once more the long, low sighing of the dreaming sea upon a coral shore. And beneath the almond-groves he sees a small church of the Catholic Mission, he hears its tinkling bell as it sounds over the blue waters; and with his most dear friend he enters again, in vivid recollection, the low-arched door; the kneeling throng of dusky mild-eyed Indians, the incense-odour, the clear song of the singers, the glimmering candles, and the great Christ outstretched upon the cross—all rise up again from the

undisturbed recesses of his heart. And then a sharper, sadder memory : he calls to mind how they parted, he and the friend that had been no less dear to him than a brother. And that which had severed them has parted each dearest one from his own true friend, since ever the world began—death.

He will not think of the cruel fever and the raging thirst, but only of the welcome rest, of the weary eyes so sweetly closed “after long toil and pain,” of the smiling silent lips, and the grave in that sapphire sea.

And then all fades away, and the present only lives. There is the dead Saviour lifted up that He may draw all men to Him; there is the bowed head and blood-stained brow, the dripping side, and, over all, the mild radiance of that crimson lamp.

It is also a Catholic chapel—the first that he has ever entered since that on the Southern Seas, where he wondered at the beauty, and thought “if only it were true!”

He kneels down, he knows not why, and gazing on the agonised Jesus, pours forth a

prayer of passionate earnestness for the friend who had been of this faith. Never, till now, had he felt near the dead in spirit ; but at this moment it seems but a little way, not far from that dim place to where the boy at rest waits patiently.

It is wrong, perhaps, he thinks of a sudden—wrong to pray for the dead ; none but the Catholics do it, and they are poor, fond holders of an ancient superstition ; he must do it no more, but he has done it once, none teaching him but God—for, O my children, God is very impatient of our puny logic, and in our hearts He has set a more glorious light of reason than any born of man's invention.

He has prayed for the dead, and he will pray again. Never again will the memory of that dead boy rise up but the living will entreat the great God for him—to grant him that pardon he so earnestly besought for all that had been amiss in his fair young life !

And as he gazes upwards to the cross, the light becomes, he thinks, more plain, the other things gather form and substance, and he can distinguish candles unlighted, vases

and flowers. He is getting used to the gentle glimmer.

He is not praying, only pondering dreamily, and thinking, "How beautiful if it were true!" And then comes back into his heart echoes of forgotten sayings of that friend of his. "This is what all the saints believed, and were they idol-worshippers?" "The Church of God is not a school of thought, a mere body of opinions; it is a glorious *thing*—beautiful to the eyes and heart, easily recognisable and unmistakable." "A Catholic is not the holder of a certain view; he is the co-heir of a most glorious heritage." And so, he not knowing it, the voice of God speaks softly to his soul. He will go a little further than of old. "And what if it were true!" he says, half-thinking. "Ah, God! that it were true!"

And so he falls asleep.

Close to where Jesus waits, longing to be loved, thirsting after the adoration of His children, the home-returning wanderer rests. After long voyaging on distant seas, tossed by fierce tempests, he is very safe, and very

near him Immanuel (God with us) reigns in veiled majesty, rejoicing over this little one come safe to port.

CHAPTER III.

HE fell asleep in the pale glimmer of the wee lamp of the Blessed Sacrament; he awakes in the bright radiance of many tapers. Into his dreams strange sounds come dull and muffled, and at last he lifts his head, but not until they have long continued, and a half consciousness has come back to him.

The light dazzles him at first, and all things show distant and blurred. The church is lighted up, and the altar is decked well with many flowers, seeming to mock the wintry snows without; before it stands a young priest, robed in white and gold-embroidered vestments, his hands are spread wide, and he sings "*Dominus vobiscum.*"

But the boy is not yet roused; again his head sinks down heavily, and with these words ringing in his ears like a far-off chime of lovely bells, he drops into sleep.

No one notices him ; they are singing the Mass of Christmas, the midnight Mass wherein the very birth of Jesus is recalled. Now and then a mother's eye falls on the half-kneeling form of the brave boy, and guessing something of his history, seeing his bonny sailor's dress, her heart goes out to him, her mother's heart, and she prays a few short words for him. That is all. When they came in to light up the church they found him there, and let him be. The priest had first come in, and seeing him thus kneeling, thought he was in prayer ; but after a while, as he passed softly to and fro, lighting the tall white tapers, he knew by the boy's even breathing that he slept.

Then, coming near, he laid a loving hand upon the dusky masses of curling hair and blessed him. "God bless thee," he whispered ; "may God to-night be with thee."

For awhile the youth slept on ; but in his ears still sounded, as he slept, the words that he had heard : "Dominus vobiscum ! Dominus vobiscum !" over and over many times, like the refrain of a joyful song ; and, in his dreams, it was his friend, his dead

friend, who sang to him "Dominus vobiscum."

But at last dreams and sounds alike ceased of a sudden : there was a rustle as when many move together, and it aroused him. His weariness was gone now, and he really woke. They were rising from their knees and sitting down. So he too rose and sat back into the corner of the seat, not a little confused, yet consoled to see that no one watched or noticed him. The young priest, with his glistening vestments, stood before the altar facing the people, and looking, as the young man thought, into his own eyes full and straight.

Where had he seen him before ? Nowhere, save only in those broken dreams, and for the short moment that he had opened his eyes before. And yet it seemed to the boy that he knew the face of that young servant of the mighty God : the clear eyes beamed upon him with a friendly and familiar light, the mouth seemed full of gentle love and sympathy. And now the lips moved, and he spoke.

CHAPTER IV.

"IN the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," he murmured, with an infinite awe and reverence, speaking low and clear, and tracing from brow to breast and shoulder to shoulder the sign of the Cross that in mind and heart he glorified and bore as a valiant warrior.

As he spoke, the priest gazed into the eyes of the sailor lad, and held them fixed on his. And the boy, obeying an inner, unconscious impulse, did as he did, making with him the sign of the holy cross, saying, in his heart of hearts, with him, the words that his lips did say.

And then for an instant the priest was silent: and the boy, blushing, wondered at himself, and trusted that none had seen.

It was very still: there was no sound within the church at all, and without was only the soft moan of a rising gale, upon whose breast came now and then the very distant clang of joybells ringing in Christmas Day. And through the quietness of middle night the voice, clear and full, but

not raised high, of that child-faced priest, spoke to his people.

“*Dominus vobiscum*,” he said.

And as the old, old salutation, wherewith for nigh twenty centuries the Christian priest has greeted his flock, sounded out solemnly, each who heard him returned, though voicelessly, the answering prayer that for their profit God might be also in his heart and spirit.

“*Dominus vobiscum*,” the priest went on. “For eighteen hundred years and more has the Lord been with us. On the first Christmas night, about this time, He came, and since He has never left us.”

Again he paused, as though recalling thoughtfully the joy of that long-gone night.

And the sailor lad thought, “Oh, if it were true ! if it were true that Jesus is ever with us here on earth, as He was to the Jews of old ! Then there would be no dreariness in the Christian Church, whose Lord was ever in the midst of her. But, alas ! He went up at Bethany, and never since has He left the heavenly places, where He reigns apart from us.”

"No," pursued the priest; "He loved us too well to leave us, and Christmas is but the first promise of Corpus Christi. Jesus came down to earth, and ever since has He been in our midst: He came, His Godhead veiled in the weakness of a little child; He stays, His very manhood veiled in the impotence of the form He wears."

All those who listened looked not on the face of him who spoke, but on the glittering doors of the Holy Tabernacle.

"This is a great mystery," said the priest, "and the grossness of our nature cannot grasp it. We are scandalised at it, for it puts us to an open shame. Was not the humility of Bethlehem enough? we cry. The humility of the child Jesus laid out in the manger—is not that stupendous enough, that we are called upon to contemplate what is incomprehensible—the humility of Jesus laid always in the Tabernacle?"

He spoke, this young man, not as one who exhorted, but as one who rather spoke in his proper person his own infinite wonderment. His voice was hushed, and on his face lay a mighty reverence, the awe of one

who, seeing a great mystery, stands staggered and abashed by its infinite majesty. For the marvel at which he looked was the humility of Jesus.

“And not alone—as if that were not enough—is Jesus with us even in the Blessed Sacrament. It is His delight to be with the sons of men, Who is even now Himself a Son of Man. He loves, he longs to come to us, to dwell with and make His abode with us.

“And this is what we *will* not understand. We can believe that He is willing to come now and then, at intervals, to visit us; but we can never credit this assertion that He desires to stay with us. And this lack of faith is really lack of love. It is because we care so little for His presence that we only half believe in it.

“We are like selfish children who love their father with a lukewarm affection. We are well content that God should be ready for us what time we care to go to *Him*; but we do not much care for Him to *be* with us. If we are sick or in trouble, then we hasten to our father for health and comfort; but when we think we need nothing at his

hands, we set no value on his society. It is as if we distrusted God, and could not give Him free entrance to our hearts: we will not suffer Him to be at home with us; we cannot bear to be familiar with Him; we keep Him well in heaven, as it were, and never dream of seeking Him in our hearts.

“We know nothing of the meaning of ‘*Dominus vobiscum.*’ The words are so familiar that they have little meaning for us at all, and we never ask ourselves what it was they meant once: that is why we enter so little into the spirit of Christmas. We will not suffer it to be anything but a commemoration: it has no personal bearing on us, save indirectly. We argue that if it were not for Christmas the Crucifixion could not have been, and there would have been no atonement; that is, if we acknowledged our thought, very much what we feel.

“We cast our eyes back through the long ages, and try to realise that first Christmas; we talk, and write, and make poetry and pictures concerning that night. It is all familiar to us—the shepherds keeping

watch, and the angelic choirs chanting their 'Gloria in Excelsis,' the stable and the stall ; the whole thing is part of a well-known picture, whose every detail we have studied. And that is all.

"But Christmas is not that. Perhaps no festival of the Holy Church is a commemoration, and no more ; certainly Christmas is not. There is not a martyr whose death we celebrate, but we do so first and foremost because it gave us one more friend in heaven ; there is not a jewel in the crown of Mary, but we honour its bestowal, not in retrospection, but gazing on her present glory, which glory adds a new prerogative whereby she may yet more powerfully assist us. And is it conceivable that the feasts of Jesus's birth and death and Holy Name are to be kept as mere monuments of long-accomplished acts—memorials of a played-out drama ?

"I have said that Christ, Who came down to earth that first Christmas Eve, has never left it since ; and this is our own most intimate connection with Christmas. No longer have we a God far off, to whom to go, but a God with us, Immanuel, wearing our flesh, and making His abode with us."

Again the young priest paused, and for a moment seemed rapt in contemplation of the mighty mystery of which he spoke.

“But not alone,” he pursued, “is Jesus ours in the Blessed Sacrament: for where He is, is the Spirit also, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son; so that we are most truly united with the awful Trinity itself; and this is the meaning of ‘*Dominus vobiscum.*’ To all of us the Spirit came in Baptism, and in greater, fuller measure at Confirmation: how have we dealt with Him ?

“He can never leave us now: it rests with us whether His sojourn be that of a joyful guest or that of a reluctant prisoner. Our hearts are, if we so make them, the home where He best loves to dwell; and our hearts, unless we bid Him welcome, and entertain Him well, are the saddest dungeon to the Holy Spirit. Which will you choose ?

“I have spoken enough: meditate yourselves on these old familiar words, ‘*Dominus vobiscum;*’ enter into their meaning, and find out new meaning in them day by day, for they are full of it. You can never ex-

haust their force, for the more you discover in them, the more will yet remain for you to find.

“And so will your Christmas Communion be a joy to you, and a joy to Him whom you receive; so will He come not as a Judge, but as a Saviour; remember the three ways in which you may take in the Lord of heaven, and agonise to reach the highest.

“First, you may receive Him as the cold tomb received Him; feeling nothing of His presence, unmoved, unwarmed by the fire of His love, and to all intents and purposes *unconscious* of His being with you.

“Then you may receive Him as they of Bethany received Him: He was welcome. They knew he was divine, but He was to them incomprehensible; they were separated from Him, they could not see Him as He is, they could only discern the outer veil of His earthly covering.

“And lastly, you may receive Him as Our Lady did. And do not be content with ‘*Dominus vobiscum* :’ you cannot help His presence with you, or get away from it. If you climb up to heaven, He is there; if you

go down into hell—as many of us do from time to time—He is there also; if you remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, far away, and tempest-tossed, very distant from the port, He is no less with you. But that is not enough. God is with us, we cannot help that; but let us be with God also.”

CHAPTER V.

AGAIN the holy sign, and the Name of God invoked, and the words of exhortation were done.

They had a quiet solemnity about them: not that the words themselves were extraordinary, but the speaking of them was their charm. He had scarce reached man's estate, this young priest, but in him shone the beauty of holiness: and on holy lips common words gain power from the Holy Ghost.

The Mass went on: and first after the sermon came the “Credo,” sung, and not read, as our sailor boy had been used to hear it. It seemed to him to have a deeper meaning than of old, and the Latin form attracted his attention, so that he thought more of each clause as it was chanted; and then at the

"INCARNATUS EST," the sudden posture of adoration brought home to him, as he had never yet felt it, the majesty of the Incarnation.

"Do I believe all this?" was his thought, as he followed the voices of the choristers. "Do I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and the Communion of Saints?"

Thought is swift, and in those few moments he reasoned somehow thus: If I believe in one Apostolic Church, I cannot believe that there are two, or ever so many churches Catholic and Apostolic; and if I believe that there is but one, either the Church of Rome is Catholic and Apostolic, and the Protestant Churches are not, or else we must deny that the *Catholics are Catholic!* No, that's absurd; how can I say I believe in one Holy and Catholic Apostolic Church?"

And then his deliberations were cut short by the young priest turning round from the altar, spreading wide his hands and chanting "*Dominus vobiscum;*" for the "*Credo*" was at an end.

Vividly the words recalled those others so lately uttered, the echoes of which still

sounded in his ears and in his heart; the old, old salutation had gained for him already, as for most of those present in the little church, a new and deeper significance. It was no longer a pious general moralisation addressed to the Church as a whole, but an irresistible and most personal command spoken to himself, full of meaning, full of reproach, and full of encouragement.

But his outward eyes and ears were fully occupied in watching the progress of the Mass. It was the first he had ever seen, and it impressed him as he hardly cared to be impressed. It was not that he thought the ritual itself so very beautiful; he could not understand its meaning, and boys are seldom admirers of ceremony, even when full of loveliness and dignity. And much of the words, nay, most of them, he failed to catch, so that even of what was being said and sung he had only a vague idea. It was none of these things that moved him. It was an inward, involuntary feeling that this is indeed the House of God; wherever He is or is not, He *is* here, and they all know it who are come to worship Him. He felt that beneath all the outward

ceremonial was something not of this earth ; God was telling him, if only he knew it, that the worship of Catholics is supernatural. And the effect it produced on his mind was an unspoken, unacknowledged conviction that now for the first time he was joining in an act of real worship, no mere sequence of prayers and hymns and preaching, but something above all these.

The bell rang and the kneeling people bowed their heads, the organ ceased and sank into silence, an utter stillness fell upon them all. He could hear no word from the priest, but he felt that the priest was praying, and more than praying, for all that. Again the bell rang, and above his head the priest held high the Victim of the Bloodless Sacrifice.

"It is the wafer—it is the Host—it is Our Lord," flashed in an instant through the young boy's mind ; and low, low down, he bent his head in awe-stricken worship and adoration, as he hailed Him God and Lord. It was his first act of faith, and it was unreserved, unresisting in the intensity of its acknowledgment. The bell rang

again, and again, and again; and still the youth worshipped.

“*Dominus vobiscum!* God is with us!” he sang in his inmost soul. “It is beautiful, and it must be true. Jesus, Who came at Christmas, has never left us; He loves us too, too well. Only, the humility of Christmas was stupendous, and the humility of Corpus Christi is incomprehensible.”

And deep into his heart sank down the conviction that it was true, neither lie nor gross deception, no fable woven out of ancient superstition, but the living, lovely truth. Jesus had come to him at Christmas in the acceptance of Corpus Christi.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Mass was over, and the people gone. Must he go too, and whither? For a while he knelt on in doubt; and then rising, he bent the knee as they had done to the Tabernacle, where the God-Man lay in less than human dignity. He would go and see the crib; they had all, one by one, been to it; and it was lighted up by many tapers, so that, though the other lights were again

put out, a strong radiance shone from it over the little church.

It was very beautiful, simple though it was. The adoring shepherds and the joyful Mother, Joseph and the Heavenly Child—that was all; beneath, the straw; above, the rough cavern. As the boy gazed on it he began to see how little he had ever *realised* Christ and Christmas; it had been with him a very lovely story of a long-gone time, but little else, perhaps nothing else.

He was alone in the church, alone as he thought, for he had not noticed the priest kneeling in the sanctuary, and making his thanksgiving. Looking on that group, he murmured, half aloud, “Jesus, Mary, Joseph—it is impossible to separate them. Why do we do it? Is it, I wonder, because after all we do not in our hearts *believe* that Our Lord is man, *still* as truly as He is God, that we only say it?”

He turned away, and face to face he met the priest—without his vestments now—in long black cassock.

“You are not going to stop in the church all night?” he asked with a smile, holding

out his hand to the boy, who grasped it with a feeling of reverent awe.

"No—I suppose I may not: besides, I want to get on."

"Get on where?" inquired the priest.
"Surely you have not far to go to-night?"

They were in the sacristy now; a warm fire burned there, and it looked cosy and bright.

"I should like to reach Oldcorn before morning; do you know how far it is?"

"Yes; it is a good nine miles. You would never get there before morning if you started now, in all the snow. Will you stay with me till about nine o'clock? after which I will drive you over there; or, if you prefer, lend you my pony for you to ride."

"But you are too kind," answered the boy, most sincerely. "You can have no interest in me," was his inward thought.

"You are a sailor," said the priest, as if in answer to it; smiling as he spoke, "and I am not at all too kind. You will stop?"

"Of course, and thank you far more than I can say. But why do you like sailors so much?"

"That I will answer," said the priest, "after you are dry and warm in bed ; let us go."

CHAPTER VII.

A SHORT walk brought them to the priest's house, where another and older priest, who was to say the third Mass, lived with the sailor boy's new friend.

It was a tiny cottage, but in the room they entered was a glorious fire, and very soon a solid, if frugal, meal stood ready on the table.

"Now eat," said the priest, "and I will talk."

"Won't you eat too ?"

"No, thanks ; I have another Mass to say," the young man answered ; "but you must be very hungry, so wait no longer."

And he was very hungry ; so he fell to and eat ravenously, as he had seldom eaten before ; for long struggling with the snow and bitter night-cold had left him almost faint, and very cold.

"I ought to tell you my name," said he

presently, with a laugh; "it is Bruton—I think I said I am from Oldcorn."

"Then I think," said the priest, "I have heard very often of you. Would you mind telling me your other name?"

The boy laughed: "It is an odd one; I am called Desmond."

"Yes, very often," said the young priest, thoughtfully, looking into the fire with sad eyes of memory. "You knew my dear brother, Hugh Garnett, did not you?"

"Of course I did, and I saw him die," the youth replied, with tremulous voice and quivering lip. "I wrote to your mother for him, telling all about it."

"And I saw the letter; he died in pain, you said?"

"He died in agony—they always do; but he was more happy than I can say. It was 'Dominus vobiscum' with him, if ever it was with anyone."

And then for a time they were silent. Each gazed deep into the red heart of the cheerful fire, thinking, thinking of the dead—of the most pure soul gone home to God, and their own sorrow at its loss.

At length the young priest raised his head :

"I am a poor substitute," he said, with a sweet humility. "But will you let me be your friend, now he is away?"

"But, oh, I am ashamed!" cried the boy, with a sudden burst of honest anger at his own unworthiness. "I am not like *him*, though I was his friend; I should sicken you."

"Neither am I like him—and so it is right."

And then the boy went to bed, weary, and glad of rest, for his cramped position had prevented the long sleep in the church from restoring him much.

"You shall be called in plenty of time in the morning," said the priest; "you will have six hours till eight o'clock, and that is good for a sailor, is not it? Good-night."

"Good-night."

Then the priest blessed him and went down. In a quarter of an hour the sailor boy lay soundly sleeping, and the young servant of God knelt before the cross, en-

treating for the new friend His Master had sent to him in the Christmas-time. For hours he prayed, and then getting weary, he too got up and slept in his chair by the warm fire; for the guest occupied his room, and there was no spare one.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESMOND slept until he was called by the young priest at a little before nine o'clock.

"You will be able to be up and at breakfast by the time my Mass is over," said Father Garnett, "and then I will see you on your way."

By a few minutes after ten o'clock the priest and his young friend were already a mile from the Mission Church, and the latter was trying to say something which should convey all the gratitude he felt for his warm welcome and the help on his way.

"Well now, I must get out and make my way back," said Father Garnett, "or I shall not be in time to hear the High Mass; but you can't miss the way now, in spite of the snow, and I have no doubt the pony will trot all the quicker for my absence."

So he jumped down and Desmond leaped out also, to say good-bye to him.

"We shall soon meet again, and for a longer time I hope," said the boy; "you will not forget me?"

He blushed like a girl as he spoke, for he meant, "You will pray for me?" and the young man by his side grasped his hand very warmly, saying:

"I am not likely to forget Hugh's friend; but Hugh's friend must not forget me either. Now good-bye, and God bless you more and more."

"Will you not say '*Dominus vobiscum*'?" asked Desmond, in a low and earnest voice; and the priest said it—said it in his heart of hearts, and with his lips too.

Then they parted: the boy light-hearted and full of joy at the return to his dear home, the priest with a great gladness at the work begun.

"O God! he is too noble to be wasted; keep him for Thyself, and be glorified in him."

And then the memory of his own dead boy came up from the deeps of his heart, and he cried to God that they three, the living and the holy dead, might be alike, and

at the last meet all together where nothing that is defiled may enter in.

* * * *

And that was a glad Christmas at Oldcorn.

God, Who is so tender and loving in His kindness, brought back the wanderer to the mother who had prayed so long with tears that at the holy time they might be all together in the beautiful old home. She saw him first: driving up to the stables, he left the carriage there, and walked round to the door of the big dark hall. Just as he pushed this open she crossed from one room to another, and their eyes met full.

She gave one low glad cry, and he held her in his arms.

"Oh, my boy, how handsome you've grown! And how tall!" she said, through her happy tears, calling up once more the youth's ready blush.

And then all the rest came out: and there was much laughter and pleasant foolish talk. He was the last to arrive, and the circle was now complete. There were no gaps yet that would *never* be filled again.

The whole history of his travels had to

be told. First, how the coach could come no further, and he had tried to walk on with no luggage; then how he lost his way, and came to the Catholic church; and a little, not much, for he was jealous of this, about the Mass, nothing about the sermon. Very little about the priest, and not a word about "*Dominus vobiscum.*"

Why? Because he loved to keep all that sacred and undisturbed in his own secret soul; because that was too holy a thing to discuss like this with laughter and light talking. To his mother he would mention it when they were alone, but not now.

"Oh, I know that priest by sight quite well," said one of them; "he is tall and slight, isn't he, and very good-looking?"

"Oh, *do* you think so?" put in Desmond's next brother. "*I* don't: he looks like a clipped angel."

I am sorry to say that Desmond boxed his brother's ears.

"Don't be impertinent: your acquaintance with angels does not justify you in expressing an opinion."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Bruton, "that he is very good and very kind, whether he is

clipped or not: I wish he were not a priest——”

“I don’t,” remarked Desmond, rather shortly: and an awkward little silence followed.

CHAPTER IX.

HE soon told his mother all about the young friend and his sailor brother whom they had left behind in that far-away land, left alone with the rippling sea above his grave, and the boom of the waves for his solemn knell.

“And have they any mother?” asked she, sorrowfully.

“Yes: Hugh spoke of her often. She is a widow, and lives all alone; it must be sad for her. She has no other children.”

Mrs. Bruton sighed: she had so many, and there was not one whose loss would not leave her desolate. Her heart went out to this lonely woman, the light of whose eyes had been taken from her, who was now keeping Christmas in the memory of loved ones that had been and would be no more forever, until that day when in the Kingdom

of our Father all parted ones shall meet, and sighing shall be done away.

“And—perhaps she is poor, Desmond?”

“She is, mother; at least Hugh was. He never was extravagant or self-indulgent, as we were.”

In this he was wrong, though: they were not poor. It was not because he *could* not, but because he *would* not, that the young sailor lad had cared little for himself and his pleasures.

“Do you think, Des, your father would let us ask her here?”

“Let us ask him,” said the boy: and they did.

Mr. Bruton looked annoyed.

“Of course, if you are set on it,” he replied, rather sharply; “but I don’t approve of that sort of thing at all.”

“Of what sort of thing?” was trembling on the tip of the boy’s tongue, but he kept silence: for the memory of his old friend was strong upon him, and he knew how unlike that old friend it was to wrangle.

“At least I will not let his mother be the subject of any harsh words or feelings,” he

thought: and, oddly enough, he felt more satisfaction in giving up his plan, kindly and loving as it was, than he generally found in the attainment of his schemes.

So Mrs. Garnett was not asked to Oldcorn, and she knew nothing of the kind hearts that had felt for her in her great loneliness: but she had a dearer one than friend or son, who never left her, and from whom she never strayed. Childless as to this world, and alone, she walked onward with eyes ever fixed steadfastly on the rest that remaineth for us all if but we will have it, and with her thin hand clasped trustingly and fearlessly in a Hand that is dyed scarlet with the blood shed nineteen hundred years ago. Little need to say to her "*Dominus vobiscum*," for she so *felt* Him by her side, in her heart, and about her sorrowful way, that there was hardly room for faith, and it was to the outward life alone that His presence was unseen.

But Desmond saw the young priest often: and their friendship grew, and striking root downward, it bore fruit upward. There was much in the life of the young man that was a most eloquently silent reproach to the boy;

he, careless and happy-hearted, began to see himself to be, after all, selfish and worldly minded. He had not, by the most shameful sins, put Jesus Christ to an open shame, but he grew to know how little he had heeded sin : how little it had horrified him, especially in himself, and how unreal holiness had appeared to him.

It was as if he only now began to know that God is a person and a Father, not a mere form of words, a sort of thing to believe. He saw that the young priest knew God as we know our friend ; that he spoke with Him often as we do to a friend ; that he denied himself for His sake, set a value on Him and took a delight in Him, as we do in one most dear to us.

And so, though I have no time to tell you of it, for it took long days and weeks, their friendship became firm and strong : and besides, it was something else, it was a sort of Sacrament. For that is the loveliness of the Catholic Church : all things which are good, all things honest and beautiful, are by her blessed and made spiritual. So that they all have a sacramental nature : all blended

together by her in the sublime intention of God's greater glory, become more than earthly.

The priest knew this, and the boy grew to perceive it: this friendship was not as his other friendships were: they two were the least part of it, our Divine Lord was the meeting-place in it; so that, absent or present, they cared little, for they were present with Him, and He with both of them. Is not this a part of the communion of saints?

And seeing much of the priest and of his people, for they walked about much together, the boy learnt without seeking it, the priest taught without knowing it, much of the spirit of the Church of Christ.

At first he but discovered, slowly and by dint of observation, that he had been taught lies concerning her.

The priest gave him no books, read no controversy to him, talked none; but in those weeks he found that Catholics were not what they are called by the malice of infuriated Satan.

The first discovery he made was that the

Second Commandment, as he had been used to call it, is not left out of the table : this made him perfectly reel and stagger with stupefied amazement. He had been so solemnly told it, so much had been made of it : and after all it was a lie !

And then began the old story. When we have found how cruelly untrue one accusation is, we mostly sift the others—or God forgive us for our laziness !

After that he kept his ears more open, and his eyes too : and neither ears nor eyes showed him that we are idolaters : he discovered the babyish deception that is practised to stultify the doctrine of Our Lady's conception free from original sin : the Pope's sinlessness and powerlessness to sin he found to be another of these wild flights of fancy, and so on through all the list of miserable misrepresentations and senseless follies.

He saw, too, the effect of the Catholic Faith on its children : to put it very shortly, he found out what zeal means. And of this zeal he became hugely envious : he began to feel the generous longing to be with

God, on His side, gathering with Him, that comes of truly understanding "*Dominus vobiscum.*"

For we cannot *realise* that God is with us, in the room with us, nay, in our hearts with us, without a great awe and longing not to turn Him away sad and disappointed.

And often he went to Mass, often to the other Offices—especially Benediction: and God gave him, as in His tenderness He does at such a time to draw us on by the magnet of His ineffable sweetness—gave him a great joy in the presence of His Son: he felt it and recognised it. He not only believed, he *knew* that Jesus Christ was there, and he knew that nowhere but there had he ever found Him before.

And so in generous love he prayed ceaselessly: "If this is the true way, make me walk in it, O Jesus Christ; and if this is but a hankering after strange gods and a running after lying lights, hold me back from following them. Thou knowest—make me know, as much as Thou wilt."

CHAPTER X.

AND so—for I cannot, even if I had the time, tell you fully how it was: none but he, and God who was with him, knew—and so he came close to the threshold of the Church.

He looked in and saw it a Garden of Delights where Jesus and the saints walk ever to and fro, and with a great longing he longed to be there too. “Oh that I could enter in and follow them!” he cried aloud in his heart, and God answered: “Come thou, My son, believe and have no fear, and thou shalt be with Me.”

So, laying his young hand with all confidence in the Father’s, he cast aside all doubt and grew courageous: it was a glorious prize—citizenship in the City of the Saints and God: joint possession with the holy men of all ages in the love and tenderness of that Mother without whom we cannot have God for our Father. But who ever yet refused a gift because it was over-precious, or held back from heirship because the possession was too wide? Nor he would.

“Father,” he said, one Sunday evening, “may I speak to you?”

“Surely,” answered the other; “come here. No one will interrupt us.”

And so they went into the library. The fire burnt warm and bright, the curtains were close-drawn, and against the pane drove hard the bitter February wind, dashing against it rain and sleet—for it was a wild, black night.

But within all was cosy and home-like; the old books on the shelves, the old pictures on the walls, the old well-worn furniture, all spoke loudly to the boy of the home he loved so well, the only home he had ever known, that had been theirs for so many, many centuries.

“Well, Des, what is it?” and his father smiled as he drew up the great arm-chair to the fire, and, sitting down, looked up with kindly pride at the brave boy, standing tall and straight before him.

It was hard to begin; it would be a cruel blow, and the old man was so dear to him, so kind.

"Father," said the boy, "try not to be angry with me!"

"It would not be the first time," responded the old man, who had missed the pathos in voice and gesture, and would only be merry; "do you remember the gray's knees, Des? Eh, boy?"

"Yes, I remember very well," said he; and his memory travelled back. It was not so very many years, after all, but it was a third of his life—back to a pleasant spring day long gone by, when he had sallied forth to the chase upon his father's gray, and brought her back with broken knees. Oh yes, he remembered it well enough, well enough; and it seemed so long ago, he felt as though he were no more a boy, as if life were now to be all struggle, and no light-hearted forgetfulness.

"Don't be so gloomy about it," cried the old man, mistaking his silence; "it was long ago, you'd do better now. And sailors are never centaurs, you know—never centaurs," repeated he, pleased with his alliteration.

"It is not that," said the boy; "it is no old offence—it has not even happened yet."

“Good-lack ! don’t tell us the boy’s going to be married, for pity’s sake. That’s not it, Des, surely ?”

“No,” said he sadly, for he had no heart to joke ; “it is quite different from that. Father, do not be very angry ; it is no use beating about the bush—I want to become a Catholic.”

For a little while there was silence—silence save for the dreary winds without, and the driving rain. Ugh ! how it poured ! One could almost *see* it falling, it sounded so near and plain ; silence, save for the quick, feverish ticking of the little clock upon the chimney-piece, and for the odd indefinite sound a fire makes. They neither of them moved, though the old man’s face was working, and his lips quivered passionately.

“He will cry,” thought the boy, “and that will be terrible. I have never seen tears in those grand old eyes.”

But he did not cry.

“Will you ring the bell ?” he said at last, and then “Thanks !” when Desmond had done so.

And again there was silence, and neither father nor son moved or uttered any sound.

Far away across the great hall Des could hear the footman coming to answer the bell ; how slowly he seemed to come ! His hand was on the lock, the door opened and he stood waiting.

The old man did not turn round ; he only said, in a voice passionately calm :

“ Will you order a carriage at once, and see that Mr. Desmond’s things are packed up as soon as possible.”

“ Yes, sir.” And the door closed, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Do you understand ?” cried the old man, in a high querulous key, when they were once more alone. “ Do you understand ?”

“ No,” said the boy ; nor did he—he was dazed—dazed, and could understand nothing.

His father laughed ; a short cruel laugh it was.

“ It is plain enough. I have just ordered

the carriage—you rang the bell yourself—and your things are to be packed; we've no further claim on you. We really don't see our way to asking you to prolong your stay among us—that's all."

"May I go and say good-bye to mother and the rest?" asked the boy, in a voice steady, but eloquent with a great agony. "Do say yes!"

"No!" thundered the old man. "*Your* mother is the Church—make the most of her! No one ever yet had two mothers. Why should *you*?"

The boy stood dumb. How could he reply—how, least of all, in the light of his new faith, could he give back taunt for taunt? It was a great anguish, but it must be borne.

And thou art not alone, brave heart, for "*Dominus vobiscum*;" and this he never once forgot. When that other father raged and stormed, he felt the Heavenly Father very near; and when his mother's sad embrace was denied him, he felt all around him the everlasting arms, and it was a mighty joy.

"You have disgraced us!" shouted the

old man. "We have worshipped neither woman nor idol for three hundred years, and now you must worship both. You never were a man in heart, and now you choose a woman's religion—it is all of a piece."

Cruel words, and most false, unhappy man—false, as you know while you say them, and for that reason all the more bitterly said.

"Go!" he cried. "I have done with you; perhaps the Virgin Mary will look after you."

"Not *perhaps*," said the boy; and even this he murmured low, so that it reached no ear but hers and God's.

"Praying to her, eh?" shouted the father, seeing his son's lips moving. "You learn your lesson quick enough—quicker than you'll ever learn to be a man or a Christian."

Yes; he was praying to her, and she in high heaven was more fervently praying for him; for she is tenderest when most we need her tenderness, and surely he needed it then.

A knock was heard. "Come in," cried

the old man ; " come in and see your precious son," he went on, seeing it was his wife.

And, passionately, he told her the truth—as he dressed it ; that is, he told her of a change, but not to that which the boy had really come to believe.

" And we really can't make room for him and his chaplain ; so he is going to leave us," concluded he. " You're in the nick of time to see him off."

" Oh, my boy !" cried the mother, and he caught her in his arms, for she flew to him. " Oh, my boy ! my handsome boy !"

" Mother," he whispered huskily, " I hear them coming, the carriage is at the door. Good-night ! Love me still, and love me more."

" Oh, my boy, I love you ! I love you !" she cried through her scalding tears. " But why——"

" No, no !" the boy entreated, kissing her on the mouth. " Let that be the last word—the last, last word."

And so it was. This Mary had gained for him. In those few minutes her mother-love, stronger than any other love that the

world has ever seen, had gained this for the sorrowing child and mother. They had kissed and spoken lovingly, and now they must part.

“The carriage is at the door, sir.”

And in another minute the boy was in it. He was turned from the doors of his old home in disgrace and shame, and he went out into the night. The wild rain beat against his pale face, the winds moaned and lamented ; but in that great house was left one, a sad and sorrowful mother, whose tears fell more bitterly than the raindrops, whose moaning went up to God more piteously than the wail of the night blasts. But God was with them, with mother and son, and in their very anguish they learned to love Him better than they had ever known before.

And the father blessed himself, and thanked God that at least this was not his eldest son—that the old lands and the old house would never fall into Papist hands for all Desmond’s shameful act. No, not they ! His eldest son was no Catholic ; many a time and oft had he torn his mother’s heart by wild and cruel deeds of

selfishness, and many another heart had he broken, but he was no Catholic; and his father thanked God for it! Never had he been turned out into the cruel night. He was but a profligate, and that was no new thing in those three hundred years.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE more scene, and that a short one, and I have done.

Come with me out into the great Atlantic; leave all land far behind, and let us stand on the mighty deep. It is such a night as that on which, a year ago, we left our brave boy in the wind and bitter rain.

The heavens are overcast, and there is no moon; not even any lightning flares far and wide its gaudy, garish fires: there is an utter darkness, as when at first it brooded on the face of the waters. The hurricane yells and screams triumphantly, strikes the waters into mighty billows, and tears the billows into hissing foam. It whistles

among the rigging of this good ship that ploughs her way through the waves, her sides dripping as one who sweats in the death-agony. She reels to and fro, she staggers like a drunken man—she is at her wits' end. A madness seems to be upon her ; she starts back like an affrighted steed as the billows strike her bows ; she dips down as if never to arise, and, rising, shakes her mane and holds upon her way.

She goes up as high as the hills and down to the valleys beneath, and her soul is sick within her—her living soul—for she has two hundred men on board, and life is dear and sweet to them, death cold and very dreary. They are mostly praying—praying, but not idle the while. God in His mercy hear their prayer ! and let us pray for all who, like them, are in such woe and anguish on the frantic bosom of the awful ocean. All are praying, save, as it seems, this one. He flits about, speaking first to one and then another, only a few words, often only two ; but they put a new spirit into those that hear, those who have heard grow calmer and more peaceful. The lurid light of the

lamps shows on their faces no more, the blank and hideous terror they had worn before. At last the boy has spoken to every one, and to each he has brought comfort.

It is Desmond.

He is in Christ's garden now ; no longer looking longingly through the open gate. He and his own people have met no more, but he has the memory of that loving embrace of his mother's, and they will meet, he prays the loving Christ, forever in the great home.

I will not tell you of the months past, only he has made them all love him, not only for his handsome face. He is the delight of the old rough seamen's hearts, and he has reflected on them some of the joy of "Dominus vobiscum." It is his nickname—not an inglorious one surely—only he does not know it.

Last of all, now, in the wild storm, he stands by an old white-haired man. He is Scotch, a rugged Lowlander, Presbyterian born, an infidel by choice, or little better ; he loves Des more than all the rest, and Des

loves him because he needs love more, and because in his face he bears a certain likeness to the boy's own father. The old man is helping to make a raft ; it is done at last, and he and Des help many of the boy-sailors on to it, with the few women and the little children.

Then the old man turns to him, and, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, says :

"Sir, I believe, ye've just convinced me—aiblins it's too late, but I believe, bonny laddie."

"God be thanked, Strachan ! I knew a thaw would come at last : the ice has been breaking these months past."

"Eh, sir," said the old man, "I wad like to live."

The boy did not misunderstand : there was no cowardice in Strachan's nature.

"To serve God, you mean, and show you're in earnest ?"

The sailor nodded : he was not much of a talker, and there were few that would have talked then.

"There's the raft," said Desmond, "it may live ; or the boats, there will be room for you in one of them."

"That wad be an unco' deevil's way o' showing God I'd learnt to love Him, to take a wee bairn's place in the raft—eh, laddie?"

Des smiled, and grasped the old man's hand:

"Come down to my cabin for a moment. I have something to say to you."

And they went down into the dark, for below not even the few lanterns hung, and shed their poor light. More by touch than sight they found it: they went in, and the boy said:

"Have you ever been baptised?"

"No: they didna fash wi' kirstening me."

"Kneel down then;" and they two together knelt on the dripping floor: it was inky black, and they could see nothing of each other, but the boy poured water on the old man's head in the form of the Holy Cross, saying the while the blessed words that made him a son of Christ.

Before it was done a horrid shudder ran along the ship: there was a terrific crash, a swirl, a gushing sound: they had

shipped a vast sea, then another and another.

"We are sinking fast," said the old man.

"But God is with us," cried the boy, "and we die where He wills us to. We shall see Him very soon: pray then and now for me; oh, do not forget me!"

He stretched out his hands in the dark, and held those of the rugged seaman; and, over him came the memory of the young priest who first had told him of "*Dominus vobiscum*," and then the memory of his home, and those he had loved so well.

And then—ay, then, the great sea came in upon them, and they were at rest for ever. With little sound or disturbance she settled down into the waters, the billows surged and seethed over the place where she had been, and the eye of man shall see her never more, never more, till the day when the sea gives up her dead.

They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters, these men see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep: we know not of

them, they are in His hand, and He is loving to all His works.

And God has granted all the prayer of the drowned sailor lad, which he prayed for the friends he loved.

Little child, whoever thou art that dost read this, say one Our Father for him who wrote it, to Him in whose honour it is written.

THE END.

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